



AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

~~NATIONAL RELATIONS OFFICE~~

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LIBRARY SERVICE TO LABOR

NEWSLETTER

Dorothy Bendix, Chairman
Joint Committee on Library Service to Labor Groups
5 Washington Street, Newark 1, N. J.

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May 1949

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CASE STUDY NO. 5

This copy of the NEWSLETTER contains the fourth in the series of studies of libraries giving special service to labor groups. The study deals with the New York Public Library and was written by Mrs. Dorothy Kuhn Oko, in charge of Library Service to Trade Unions.

TRAINING LIBRARIANS FOR LIBRARY SERVICE TO LABOR

As was announced in NEWSLETTER No. 5, the Joint Committee collected information on labor institutes to be held this summer which librarians planning to serve labor might find profitable to attend. The list which covers only a small part of all the institutes to be held follows. If additional information becomes available, a supplement will be issued in the June NEWSLETTER.

<u>Date</u>	<u>Name of Institute</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Write for information to:</u>
June 4-10	Steelworkers Institute (University of California)	Asilomar, Calif.	Abbott Kaplan, Head Labor Management Relations Inst. of Ind. Relations Univ. of California Los Angeles, Calif.
June 13-16	Rutgers Labor Institute	New Brunswick, N. J.	Irvine L.H. Kerrison In Ch. Labor Program Institute Mgt. & Lab. Rela. Rutgers University New Brunswick, N. J.
July 2 - Aug. 13	Hudson Shore Labor School General Session (Minimum attendance: Two weeks.)	West Park, N. Y.	Miss Rhett M. Arter Hudson Shore Labor School Room 503 95 Liberty Street New York 6, N. Y.

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<u>Date</u>	<u>Name of Institute</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Write for information to:</u>
July 3-30	School for Workers Workers' Education Training Course	Madison, Wisconsin	Ernest E. Schwarztrauber, Dir. University of Wisconsin School for Workers 1214 West Johnson St. Madison 5, Wis.
July 10-23	School for Workers General Institute	Madison, Wisconsin	Same as above.
July 17-29	Kentucky Labor School	Eastern State College, Richmond, Ky.	Sam Ezelle, Director Dept. Research & Education Kentucky State Fed. Labor 312 Armory Place Louisville 2, Ky.
July 30- Aug. 13	White Collar Work- shops	Ohio State University Columbus, Ohio	Miss Alice Shoemaker, Acting Director Summer School for Office Workers 1776 Broadway New York 19, N. Y.
Aug. 4-6	Montana Labor Institute	Mont. State University Missoula, Montana	Miss Lucille Speer, Sec'y. Montana Labor Institute State University Library Missoula, Montana
Aug. 21- Sept. 5	Hudson Shore Labor School Training Program in Workers Educa- tion Methods	West Park, N. Y.	Miss Rhetta M. Arter Hudson Shore Labor School Room 503 95 Liberty Street New York 6, N. Y.
Sept. 4-16	Calif. State Fed- eration of Labor (University of California)	Asilomar, Calif.	Abbott H. Kaplan, Head Labor Management Relations Inst. Industrial Relations University of California Los Angeles, Calif.

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LIBRARIANS AND LABOR EDUCATORS CONFER

As was mentioned in NEWSLETTER No. 5, a new feature was added this year to the Annual Washington's Birthday Workers' Education Conference sponsored by American Labor Education Service and held in New York on February 26-27, 1949.

At a pre-conference session union education directors, librarians working closely with organized labor, and university labor education people met to discuss how labor educators and librarians can cooperate in stimulating the use of workers' education materials, be it in book, pamphlet, or film form.

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The following problems were discussed in some detail:

(1) The Suitability of Existing Materials both in terms of their Readability and General Appeal.

It was pointed out that the problem of readability is still so much in its infancy that ideas among labor education people as to what is readable in terms of their own members vary widely. An example is the UAW staff's opinion of their periodical AMMUNITION which has been described both as "talking down" and as "too high-brow" for the average autoworker.

It was felt that librarians could perform a definite function both in calling the attention of local workers' education people to the readability problem and in using their influence in having more readable material published by commercial publishers.

(2) The Prerequisites for Effective Library Service to Labor

Providing reading materials at points where workers come together, e.g. at union halls, in plants, in bookmobiles at factory gates, was considered important but not a guarantee for success by itself. Interested and able union education committee members were regarded as essential "inside" helpers. Familiarity with union members and their day-to-day needs and interests on the part of the librarian is, of course, also imperative.

(3) Library Information Service to Labor

Libraries can, and a few do, serve as information centers for local unions, having on hand or searching for factual material upon request. Libraries can also serve unions with their film resources, either by actually lending films and film strips or by acting as clearing house for audio-visual aids.

There was also some discussion of the aims of union education programs, whether they should give more emphasis to the general and cultural aspects or should be concerned mainly with training for trade union activities, recognizing that the need will vary in accordance with the group involved. It was pointed out that there is a definite need for the librarian to understand the needs of the particular group if library service to labor is to be made most effective.

It was felt that this meeting was a good beginning and that the discussion should be continued at a similar meeting next year.

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LIBRARY SERVICE TO LABOR GROUPS
THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

Case Study No. 5
May, 1949

by

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in charge of
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New York, N. Y.

History of the Service

Sporadic attempts were made as early as 1939 to supply collections of books to various unions in New York, as an integral function of the Extension Division of The New York Public Library.

In 1944, as a result of specific requests from a number of different unions, it was decided to place this service on a firmer basis. Following a conference with some union officials, a cooperative plan was evolved whereby the union and the Library contributed equally to a fund to purchase books for these collections. The union was to assume responsibility for running its library and The New York Public Library was to select books and to rotate the collections so that they would be kept up-to-date and of interest to the special group supplied. The librarian responsible for this service was a regular member of the Extension Division staff. She carried on this work in addition to her other regular duties.

In the course of the next three years, some six union libraries were opened. The services to unions were handicapped by a number of unavoidable difficulties, such as changes in personnel, limited book stocks and war-time pressures.

By 1947, the Superintendent of the Extension Division had reached the conclusion that unless some more satisfactory type of service could be evolved, the whole library-union plan should be abandoned. Through a combination of circumstances it became possible to designate one full-time member of the staff, qualified for this type of work, to experiment with the possibilities of a sound constructive plan for Library Service to Trade Unions.

Types of Services Provided

This past year, the first of intensive efforts, has been largely one of exploration and experimentation. We have followed leads and demands rather than establish plans or set up work patterns. The guiding principle has been to support and stimulate trade unions in their educational and research programs wherever an opportunity presented itself.

The chief types of services provided are:

1. The cooperative plan for depository collections has been continued and developed. Where insufficient supervision or poor circulation of books existed, the collections have been removed. New libraries have been established in other unions where there was an active educational director or someone within the organization interested and able to give adequate attention to the books. Sizes of collections have in several instances been reduced from a total of 250 volumes to as few as 100.

The initial selection of these books has been made jointly by the librarian and the education director alone, or with two or three union members who have constituted themselves the library committee. The basic collection is replenished every six or eight weeks with from 20 to 30 new titles, again selected jointly. In addition to these regular installments, special requests by individual readers or by the union librarian are filled as they arise. In addition to this active personal connection between the union and the library, various other techniques for promoting reader interest are being tried. Among these are regular columns in the union paper telling about the library, listing new titles, or publishing book reviews written by various union members. Bulletin boards carrying items of interest about the library have been posted in the various shops of one of the unions. The librarian from The New York Public Library gives book talks at meetings of the members in another of the unions.

2. Services to specific Workers' Education projects have taken a variety of forms:

a. In several instances, we have supplied collections of books and pamphlets for use in connection with regular classes. At the Woman's Trade Union League the subjects included Drama, Music, Art, Science, Public Affairs, and Trade Union History. At the Hudson Shore Labor School, materials were supplied as requested by individual teachers to supplement their permanent school collection. At two of the classes carried on under the New York State School of Industrial and Labor Relations, books and pamphlets on trade union problems and on the cooperative movement were brought to the groups and circulated among the members. An exhibition of all types of materials was presented at a four-day institute of the International Association of Machinists and a similar service was rendered at a one-day session of the International Ladies Garment Workers.

b. Where arrangements precluded supplying books, reading lists were prepared in connection with classes or individual lectures. Such a list was prepared for the Nurses' Guild and published in their bulletin. A very extensive list was supplied to the International Association of Machinists after the Institute. This was mimeographed and circulated among all members who had attended. Teachers in two Catholic labor schools have also received similar assistance.

c. Recently requests have come for reference collections for the use of officers in one or two unions. Where possible, books were supplied from The New York Public Library collection and these were supplemented with suggestions of titles which the union itself would have to purchase.

d. Assistance has been given to several unions in developing their own exhibits for special occasions. Notably, for Negro History Week, pictures were obtained from several of our picture collections and these were supplemented with suitable books, pamphlets and attractive book jackets of recent publications by Negroes.

3. Information and reference services are offered all labor groups. Through tools available in the Office of Adult Services, we can give ready answers to questions about books, publishers, educational facilities and the like. Through our large reference collection, we can answer the more complicated questions on legislation, statistics, etc.

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4. A beginning has also been made in helping unions plan programs for special meetings. Recently, a film information center was organized in the Office of Adult Services. Here many educational films are listed by title and subject with evaluations, often made by members of our staff. In addition an extensive collection of catalogues and guides is available to help secure films and develop discussion programs or for use in selecting reading matter to supplement film showings. We also have assisted in securing speakers for union meetings.

5. Promotion of interest in this special service, both outside the library and within, is another of our functions.

a. The librarian has whenever possible attended meetings of labor groups and other interested organizations to inform them of services the New York Public Library has to offer not only to labor groups in the community but to individuals in the community. A circular containing a map which indicates the location of branches is a very effective form of publicity. A trip through the library by members of one of the trade union classes proved another valuable experience for all concerned.

b. Within the library, interest is being stimulated by the following:

1) A "Workshop on Industrial Relations" for Readers' Advisers and Assistant Branch Librarians has been conducted under the chairmanship of the librarian in charge of Service to Trade Unions. Books and pamphlets in this field have been read and discussed.

2) A booklist on "Understanding Labor" was published in a recent issue of the Branch Library Book News.

3) Librarians from the branches planning programs on labor subjects or wanting any assistance in this field come to us for help.

4) A special collection of books, periodicals and pamphlets in the field of labor has been assembled. These materials are being used not only in connection with our service to unions, but also as a means of stimulating interest and awareness among librarians throughout the Circulation Department.

Personnel and Cost of the Service

One professional librarian devotes full time to this work. She calls upon a part-time secretary and occasional clerical workers to help her in some of the routines. But all of the work of promotion, selection, supervision and administration is carried on by this one individual. The total cost of the service is difficult to estimate. From \$4000 to \$5000 would probably cover the actual expense of running this service exclusive of book purchases. These are paid for in part by union contributions.

Relation of the Service to the Rest of the Library

The librarian in charge of these services is attached to two departments of the Circulation Department, the Extension Division and the Office of Adult Services. This makes it possible to coordinate the extension function of trade union libraries with the adult education function of workers' education. Further, a close cooperation with divisions of the Reference Department, especially the Economics Division, has been established.

Plans for Future Service

1. Developing the use of the union libraries already established as an adjunct to union educational programs.
2. Opening more collections, preferably in factories where unions can obtain permission to institute these libraries.
3. Cooperating more effectively with workers' education projects within the New York City area.
4. Promoting the use of the film information center.
5. Continuing to stimulate interest among the library staff in needs of labor groups and helping them to satisfy these needs.

Evaluation of the Service

Because the program has been in existence for such a short time, only general evaluations can be made.

Undoubtedly among unions there is a great need, often unformulated, for some type of library service. Given the present limitations of staff and budget, we are confronted with the question of the most effective way to develop the work. Already we have reached the limit of our capacity to open and supervise new union collections. To abandon these, however, and to concentrate on other forms of the service would mean to lose intimate contacts with the labor movement which are essential to any aspect of library service to unions.

On the other hand, from the library's viewpoint, the other forms, such as visits to classes, to union meetings, and the like are an important part of public relations as well as of adult services. Through these procedures the idea of the library and its place in the community is brought to one of the largest organized groups of citizens. That these groups come to appreciate the importance of the library to them is evidenced not only by their increased use of it but also by their readiness to rally to appeals for assistance at budget hearing time, as well as constant enthusiastic comments.

Therefore we feel that it is important to carry on in as many directions as possible, keeping in mind always that we are only blazing a trail.